

BOOK REVIEW

"From Colonialism to World Community"

EDITOR:

John Coventry Smith did not plan to write his memoirs. Not until Bishop Newbigen in 1977 challenged him, "When are you going to make a record for us of your experience in the missionary and ecumenical movement?" It is a Church History Biography — a kind of Christian Adventure Story — that gives the reader many insights into the personal life of John and Floy Smith, a remarkable couple, full of the grace, love, and gentleness of Christ.

Anyone who is ready to give up main-line Protestant missions for dead should first read John Coventry Smith's *From Colonialism to World Community* (Philadelphia, Geneva Press, 1982). Dr. Smith does not shut his eyes to signs of decline. "Performance in the new day" of missions which was so triumphantly heralded thirty or forty years ago, he writes, "has not measured up to vision." The church still carries the scars of a crisis of faith, and has not yet recovered from its neglect of evangelism. But the vision was no mirage, he contends, and this is no time for the wringing of hands. It is precisely in times like these that throughout the history of the church, "faith deepened, courage was born, and new creative ideas emerged to challenge the future."

Much of this autobiography's warm charm lies in its very personal picture of a thinking, caring Christian working his way through times of shattering change and deciding with great faith and courage where, on the one hand, he should change as the world changes, and how he can persuade the institutional church to change with him. Or when, on the other hand, the church and the Christian must still stand true to a Lord who "is the same, yesterday, today and forever."

John and Floy Smith went as young Presbyterian missionaries to a Japan preparing for war and to a mission still organized in traditional patterns. We welcomed and encouraged the beginnings of transition from focus on foreign mission to emphasis on the Japanese church. When war came, he emerged without bitterness from a year of harsh imprisonment in a Yokohama internment camp. Back in the United States he received a succession of

pivotal appointments and elections: as secretary of one of America's oldest mission boards, moderator of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, and finally, as a president of the World Council of Churches. Ironically, in 1964 he almost went to prison again, this time in America, for a Freedom Day demonstration in Hattiesburg.

His unassuming but gripping account of the early years in Japan and the later years in the corridors of ecclesiastical power is the clearest and most readable record yet available of how Christian missions changed in the tumultuous years of the last half century, "from colonialism to world community" as the book's title puts it, from missions to churches, from three continents to six, and from one-way missions to ecumenical relations in mission.

The jury is still out on some of the changes he describes, and perspectives differ. But for better or for worse the mission has changed in image and methods, and Smith gives reason for hope that most changes are indeed for the better. The decline in mainline missionary numbers is no cause for rejoicing, but it can in part be explained by the rise of the younger churches, and that in turn promises a vital new partnership in mission.

It is true, and perhaps it should be pointed out, that there are counter-trends today which threaten to checkmate the new partnerships. Emotional nationalism runs high in third world churches, and divides as easily as it ever did in the west. Protectionism by governments is raising new barriers to international mission. But John Coventry Smith has a way of restoring faith, not undercutting it. We can take heart from his closing affirmation that we still have "a particular contribution to make in the process by which God renews the life of the community of believers and sends them forth afresh as witnesses to the good news."

Samuel Hugh Moffett
Princeton, N.J.

HOW TO ASCERTAIN THE WILL OF GOD

By George Mueller

1. I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the trouble with people generally is just here. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the *Lord's will*, whatever it may be. When one is truly in this state, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what *His will* is.

2. Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If so, I make myself liable to great delusions.

3. I seek the *Will of the Spirit of God* through, or in connection with, the *Word of God*. The *Spirit* and the *Word* must be combined. If I look to the *Spirit* alone without the *Word*, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the *Holy Ghost* guides us at all, *He* will do it according to the *Scriptures* and never contrary to them.

4. Next I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate *God's will* in connection with *His Word* and *Spirit*.

5. I ask *God* in prayer to reveal *His will* to me aright.

6. Thus, through prayer to *God*, the study of the *Word*, and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge, and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly. In trivial matters, and in transactions involving most important issues, I have found this method always effective.

BIGGEST CHURCHES IN THE U.S.A.

Two years ago Lee Roberson at Highland Park Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee had the largest membership with 54,989 and Jack Hyles, First Baptist Church, Hammond, Indiana was second with 52,255. But this year the leader is clearly First Baptist, Hammond, Indiana with a 15,012 growth in new members.

Statistics: the Hammond Church, 67,267 and Chattanooga, 56,041. Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia is a weak third with a mere 19,000. Then it drops all the way down to Temple Baptist in Detroit, 10,088; First Baptist in West Hollywood, Florida, 8,343; etc. Sunday school attendance? The Hammond folks have 18,004 and Chattanooga 11,000; Lynchburg, 8,000.